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FACE THE MUSIC

to confront a difficult or unpleasant situation;
to accept the unpleasant consequences of one's
own actions

1. Jessica's parents have always made excuses for her bad behavior, but this time they told her they were not going to protect her, and that it was time she *faced the music*.
2. Paul took his parents' car without permission and put a big dent in it. He knew they would find out, so he decided he'd better *face the music* and tell the truth right away.

Compare to: *bite the bullet*; *take the bull by the horns*

Whereas *bite the bullet* focuses on preparing oneself to accept physical pain or punishment, *face the music* focuses more on accepting responsibility for some misdeed.

FAIR AND SQUARE

honest(ly)

1. Some people believe Andrew cheated, but he won the contest *fair and square*.
2. The working people didn't like the result of the election, but the opposition's candidate won honestly. The election was *fair and square*.

Compare to: *square deal*

In this expression, "square" means "right," or "not crooked."

FAIR SHAKE, GET/GIVE (SOMEONE) A

to give someone or something a chance to prove
itself

1. Don't dismiss this place so quickly; spend a little time getting used to it. *Give it a fair shake*.
2. You accuse me of stealing money from the store, but you don't give me a chance to tell you my side of the story. You're *not giving me a fair shake*.

FAIR TO MIDDLING

average; neither good nor bad

1. Don asked Melissa what she thought of the new restaurant. She told him she had been to better ones, but it wasn't bad. It was *fair to middling*.
2. Now that I'm beginning to get over my cold, I'm feeling *fair to middling*. I feel better than I did last week, but I still have a stuffy nose.

FAIR-WEATHER FRIEND

a person who is loyal in good times but not when
times are difficult

1. They thought Charles would help them the way they had helped him, but as soon as they asked for help, he disappeared. He turned out to be just a *fair-weather friend*.
2. Everybody wanted to be Sally's friend when she won the lottery. They weren't real friends, however; they were *fair-weather friends*.

The expression suggests the idea that someone is a friend only when the weather is good, i.e., in good times.

FALL BY THE WAYSIDE

to drop out of the situation

1. When Greg had too many groceries to carry at once, he decided to keep what he needed for dinner that night and let the rest *fall by the wayside*.
2. Larry's parents told him to look to the future, concentrate on his long-term goals, and let the unimportant things *fall by the wayside*.

FALL FOR (SOMETHING)

to be deceived or believe an unlikely story

1. You want me to believe that you're late because you ran out of gasoline? You must think I'm a fool if you think I'm going to *fall for that*.
2. The judge said she didn't believe the thief's excuse that he simply forgot to pay for the food. The judge told him, "I'm not going to *fall for that old story*."

FALL FOR (SOMEONE)

to be in love with a person

1. Mike says that he *fell for* Rose the first time he saw her, and now they're getting married.
2. I know that man is handsome, but you don't want to *fall for* him—he's only in town for a week.

FALL OFF THE WAGON

to lose control of oneself and engage in a
compulsive behavior

1. She was doing well on her diet, but then she *fell off the wagon* and ate a gallon of ice cream.
2. If you're serious about staying sober, you shouldn't put yourself in situations where you might give in to temptation and *fall off the wagon*. Don't go to bars or parties where alcohol might be served.

This expression is generally used to refer to negative behaviors, especially alcoholism.

FALL ON DEAF EARS

to be heard but ignored, or to be heard but to have no effect

1. Ashley went to the bank to beg for a loan because she had no job, but no one would listen to her. Her pleas *fell on deaf ears*.
2. The young husband tried to tell his wife why he was late getting home, but his excuse *fell on deaf ears*.

Compare to: *turn a deaf ear*.

The expression is used to describe spoken words. The listener is not really deaf, but acts that way. This idiom is essentially synonymous with *turn a deaf ear*, but whereas the request *falls on deaf ears*, the person who ignores the request *turns a deaf ear*.

FAR CRY FROM (SOMETHING)

much less than what was expected or anticipated

1. The bellboy took them to their hotel room. It was small, dark, and dirty—a *far cry from* what they were expecting.
2. Don't get your expectations up too high. What you get may be a *far cry from* what you want.

FAT CAT

a rich but usually lazy person

1. Now that Mr. Anderson is rich, he rides around town in a fancy car like a *fat cat* and has everyone else do the work.
2. Richard is such a *fat cat* businessman. He owns several supermarkets.

The expression is primarily used to describe a man (usually not a woman) who, although rich, is not seen as industrious. He has perhaps become wealthy through hard work but is now relaxing, or he has never had to work for his wealth.

FEATHER IN (ONE'S) CAP

an exceptional achievement

1. Cassandra managed through hard work to win a big contract for her company. It was a real *feather in her cap*.
2. The scholarship Lee won to attend the university was a *feather in his cap*.

Synonym: *something to crow about*

Antonym: *nothing to write home about*

Compare to: *feather (one's) nest*

The practice of placing a feather in one's cap is centuries old and appears to have been practiced in many different cultures. The feather was awarded and worn as a sign of a significant achievement by the wearer. In some cultures, such as 16th-century Hungary, it was a crime to wear a feather when one had not earned the right.

FEATHER (ONE'S) NEST

to build up one's riches, usually quietly and perhaps by some unethical method (sentence 2)

1. They have been working very hard these past few years, trying to *feather their nest* for retirement.
2. Mr. Jones has been *feathering his nest* with company money ever since he gained access to the safe. One of these days he's going to be found out and fired.

The expression suggests the idea of a bird making itself comfortable by adding feathers to its nest.

FEEL (SOMETHING) IN (ONE'S) BONES [HAVE A FEELING IN (ONE'S) BONES]

to sense something without being able to see, hear or feel it; to have a premonition

1. The sky may be clear, but it's going to rain. I can *feel it in my bones*.
2. Do you ever get the feeling that someone is watching you, even though you can't see him or her? You *get this feeling in your bones*.

FEEL THE PINCH

to have less money than one used to have, and less than one feels is necessary

1. The government raised taxes so much that even the rich began to *feel the pinch*.
2. When we had to pay for the university education of all three of our children at the same time, we really *felt the pinch*.

Synonym: *strapped for cash*

FIELD DAY

a wild and uncontrolled time; a time of especially pleasant or exciting action

1. The dogs got loose in Rachel's flowerbeds and had a *field day*. They virtually destroyed it.
2. The children had a *field day* spraying each other with the water hose. They were soaked within minutes.

FIGHT TOOTH AND NAIL

to fight fiercely; to fight with everything you have

1. The candidate said he would *fight tooth and nail* to get elected.
2. The two girls fought *tooth and nail* on the playground until a teacher interrupted.

The expression suggests that the fighter uses both teeth and fingernails or claws.

FILL/FIT THE BILL

to suit or satisfy a need

1. I'm looking for a lightweight gray suit. This one *fits the bill*—I can wear it year-round.
2. We thanked the real estate agent for trying to find us a house, but the ones she showed us just didn't *fill the bill*.

Synonym: *hit the spot*.

FILTHY RICH

extremely wealthy

1. He started the leading software company in the world. He's not just a little rich—he's *filthy rich*!
2. Whenever I buy a lottery ticket, I dream about what I would buy if I were *filthy rich*.

Antonym: *flat broke*

This expression arose from the idea that money was "filthy," or dirty. For some people, the idiom still carries a negative connotation. But for others, to be filthy rich is a dream.

FINE KETTLE OF FISH

a terrible mess

1. You borrowed money from the bank without telling me and we don't have enough to pay it back. This is a *fine kettle of fish* you've gotten us into.
2. Lois told her boss she could work on Saturday, but she forgot and promised her girlfriend she would help her move on Saturday. She had gotten herself into a *fine kettle of fish*.

The word "fine" is meant ironically.

FINE-TOOTH COMB

an imaginary device one uses to look for something very carefully

1. That professor goes over his students' research papers with a *fine-tooth comb* looking for mistakes. If there are any, he finds them.
2. The police examined the crime scene. They went over it with a *fine-tooth comb*, but they couldn't find any.

The expression suggests the idea that if something can be found (i.e., if it exists), it can be found by using a comb with very fine (i.e., closely spaced) teeth.

FIRST-RATE

best quality

1. George did a *first-rate* job on these drawings. I've never seen better.
2. Lynn's work is always the best. It's always *first-rate*.

Antonyms: *second-rate*; *third-rate*

FISH OUT OF WATER

a person who is uncomfortable in a situation or doesn't belong in a particular environment

1. Joe felt out of place at the fancy dinner dance, like a *fish out of water*.
2. You could tell they were uncomfortable making polite conversation with their son's friends. They were *fish out of water*.

Synonym: *out of (one's) element*

Antonym: *in (one's) element*

FISHY

looking or sounding suspicious

1. They won't say where they got their computer. Their story sounds *fishy* to me. I think they may have stolen it.
2. Someone called on the telephone telling me I had just won a free trip to Hawaii, but first I had to buy his or her product. It sounded pretty *fishy*, so I hung up.

FITS AND STARTS

in short bursts of motion or effort

1. When you play the violin, you must move the bow across the strings smoothly, not in *fits and starts*.
2. It took Sally a long time to finish her education. She pursued it in *fits and starts*.

FIX (SOMEONE'S) WAGON

to return an irritation caused by a person through some form of mild revenge

1. They think they can just come in here and order us around like servants. Well, we'll *fix their wagon*—next time they come, we'll ignore them.
2. That guy always parks his car in front of my driveway so I can't get out. Next time he does that, I'm going to let the air out of his tires. That'll *fix his wagon*.

Compare to: *give (someone) a taste of his own medicine*; *tit for tat*

FLASH IN THE PAN

a temporary or passing fancy; a fad or attraction that will fade quickly

1. I know he's been acclaimed as the best new playwright in the country, but I think he's just a *flash in the pan*. No one will know who he is by next year.
2. Short skirts are in fashion again, but I hope they're just a *flash in the pan*. I would hate to have to start wearing them again.

The expression comes from an old type of weapon, the flintlock musket. In these muskets, gunpowder was first ignited in a small depression or pan; this powder was supposed to cause the charge in the musket to explode. But sometimes the powder just burned harmlessly, giving off a flash but nothing more.

FLAT BROKE

have absolutely no money

1. I'd gladly loan you the money, but I can't because I'm *flat broke*.
2. They lost all their money in the stock market crash, and now they're *flat broke*.

Antonym: *filthy rich*

Compare to: *go broke*

FLY-BY-NIGHT

undependable; untrustworthy

1. The small trading company took in a lot of money from trusting investors and then closed up. It had been a *fly-by-night* operation.
2. Although Darlene had been working for the company for a few months and they had paid her, she still didn't trust them. She felt she was working for a *fly-by-night* company.

The expression suggests the idea that the operation closes up and flees under the cover of darkness rather than in the clear light of day.

FLY IN THE FACE OF (SOMETHING)

to go against something; to show disrespect for something or someone

1. John has decided not to go to college. It's a bad decision on his part. It *flies in the face* of all common sense.
2. If you marry someone your parents disapprove of so much, it will *fly in the face of everything* they want for you.

FLY IN THE OINTMENT

an unpleasant element in an otherwise pleasant situation

1. The trip was all planned. Our tickets were paid for. Then the boss said we had an unexpected increase in orders and that we would have to take our vacation another time. What a *fly in the ointment*!
2. I'm not sure, but I think we have a *fly in the ointment*. I know I said I would take you to the ball game this weekend, but I remembered this morning that I already offered to give my extra ticket to someone at work.

FLY OFF THE HANDLE

to suddenly become very angry

1. When Dana came home and found that her husband had painted the house bright pink without asking her, she *flew off the handle*. She was so angry that he painted it white again.
2. Nathan has a very short temper. He gets angry and *flies off the handle* for the slightest reason.

Synonyms: *blow (one's) stack*; *see red*

FLY THE COOP

to escape

1. The prisoner waited until the guards were fast asleep. He unlocked his cell door with a hairpin and *flew the coop*.
2. The man felt trapped in a dead-end job. All he wanted to do was *fly the coop*.

The expression is usually used in connection with being in jail (sentence 1) but can also be used figuratively (sentence 2). It is a reference to captured birds escaping when their cage (coop) is opened.

FOLLOW IN (SOMEONE'S) FOOTSTEPS

to follow the same career or lifestyle as someone else

1. James was a convicted thief who had spent years in jail. He didn't want his son to *follow in his footsteps*.
2. The daughter had always admired her mother's work helping the poor. From an early age she was determined to *follow in her mother's footsteps*.

Compare to: *chip off the old block*

The *someone* in the expression is traditionally, but not necessarily, a parent.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

something to think about

1. When asked about a tax increase on gasoline to help pay for public education, the governor said he hadn't considered that kind of tax, but he said it certainly was *food for thought*.
2. Sarah read the book that had been recommended to her and found that it contained a lot of *food for thought*.

Compare to: *chew it over*

In use since the early 1800s, this idiom refers metaphorically to the idea that the mind 'chews' on thought like the mouth chews on food.

FOOL AROUND

to play, or to not be serious about an activity

1. Don't worry about the boys playing in the back yard—I can see them through the window. They're just *fooling around*.
2. If you want to pass history class, you'll have to study hard and not *fool around*.

Synonyms: *horse around*, *clown around*, *monkey around*

This expression can be neutral (sentence 1) or slightly negative (sentence 2).

FOOL'S GOLD

something that appears to have great value but is in fact a cheap imitation

1. The scientists thought they had discovered a source of cheap energy through their experiments, but it later proved to be nothing but *fool's gold*.
2. Don't invest all your money in a fancy scheme that seems too good to be true. All you'll end up with is *fool's gold*.

The expression originates from miners who often found veins of a gold-colored substance called pyrite, which they mistook for gold.

FOOTLOOSE AND FANCY-FREE

able to go anywhere and do anything that one wants; carefree

1. Michael didn't want to get married. He wanted to remain *footloose and fancy-free*.
2. When they finished college, they spent a year traveling though Europe with their backpacks and sleeping bags. They just wanted some time to be *footloose and fancy-free*.

The expression literally means one's foot is not tied down and one can freely follow one's impulses (fancy).

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

something that one cannot have

1. When people can readily have something, they don't want it. But when you tell them they can't have it, that's all they want. There's nothing like the attraction of *forbidden fruit*.
2. Jody's parents told her not to date Dennis because they think he might be a bad influence on her. But now that they've made him *forbidden fruit*, he's the only boy who interests her.

The expression originates from the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, where God forbade Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from one of the trees in the Garden of Eden. This made the fruit so tempting that they were unable to resist eating it.

FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH, A

something or someone whose influence or power must be considered

1. I underestimated the influence of Mr. Franklin in this company. He certainly is *a force to be reckoned with*.
2. Catherine seemed to be a gentle person, but when Roger angered her, she lashed out at him. He discovered she was *a force to be reckoned with*.

FOR CRYING OUT LOUD

an expletive that means "This is ridiculous!" or "I've had enough!" It carries no literal meaning of its own, but expresses a strong degree of exasperation.

1. All you do is complain. *For crying out loud*, can't you give us some peace and quiet for a while?
2. The children were jumping around, chasing after each other and running around their mother until she couldn't stand it anymore. She said to them, "Stop playing around, *for crying out loud*."

Synonyms: *for goodness' sake!*; *for heaven's sake!*

FOR GOODNESS' SAKE

an expletive that means "This is ridiculous!" or "I've had enough!" It carries no literal meaning of its own, but expresses a strong degree of exasperation

1. This traffic is making me crazy! *For goodness' sake*, can't we go any faster?
2. *For goodness' sake*, why didn't we order movie tickets ahead of time? The line is so long that we'll probably miss the beginning!

Synonyms: *for crying out loud!*; *for heaven's sake!*

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE

an expletive that means "This is ridiculous!" or "I've had enough!" It carries no literal meaning of its own, but expresses a strong degree of exasperation

1. *For heaven's sake*, why are you up so early? Go back to bed, so I can sleep!
2. *For heaven's sake*, how can it be so hot outside? I wish we had air conditioning.

Synonyms: *for goodness' sake!*; *for crying out loud!*

FOR THE BIRDS

a waste of time; mixed up or confused

1. We've been waiting in this line for movie tickets over four hours. Let's go home. This is *for the birds*.
2. The boss wants us to work every Saturday for the next three months without pay. He's *for the birds*.

Synonyms: *all wet* (sentence 1); *out to lunch* (sentence 2)

FORTY WINKS

a short sleep, usually during the day

1. There's a little time before lunch. I think I'm going to lie down for a while and catch *forty winks*.
2. My husband always likes to put his feet up in the easy chair and get *forty winks* before supper.

FOURTH-RATE

of inferior quality; not the best

1. The company introduced a new car model, but the production quality is still *fourth-rate*, like all their other cars.
2. My assessment is that he's a *fourth-rate* man with a first-rate education. He's been well trained, but I don't think he understands what our company's about.

Antonym: *first-rate*

Synonyms: *second-rate*; *third-rate*

Expressions using *rate* generally go only as far as *fourth-rate*. *Second-*, *third-*, and *fourth-rate* are synonymous. There are no degrees of inferiority. They are all opposites of *first-rate*.

FROM DAY ONE

from the beginning; from the outset

1. Their new employee caused trouble *from day one*.
They fired him only a month after hiring him.
2. *From day one*, I knew she was the girl for me. It really was a case of love at first sight.

Synonym: *from the word go*

FROM THE WORD GO

from the beginning

1. I didn't understand a thing from the moment the math teacher opened his mouth. I was lost *from the word go*.
2. The candidate was never half-hearted about winning.
She was serious *from the word go*.

Synonym: *from day one*

The expression suggests a race in which the beginning is marked by the word go.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

to proceed with maximum power and speed

1. We finally got the money from the bank to build our house, and now we're ready to go *full steam ahead*.
2. Patrick wasn't fully aware of how bad the situation was, but he charged in *full steam ahead* anyway.

The expression suggests the idea that when a steam engine is full of steam, it operates at maximum power.